



## 3.2 BUFFALO RIVER PARKS

### (OHIO STREET PARK, SMITH STREET PARK, BAILEY AVENUE PARK)

#### DESCRIPTION

Over the past few years, the County of Erie has taken a leadership role in the preservation and enhancement of the environment along the Buffalo River. This former industrialized corridor has seen much improvement with regard to water quality and habitat restoration. The County has worked closely with the City of Buffalo, New York State and various Federal Agencies to acquire three small, but notable, park sites along the Buffalo River, including Ohio Street Park, Smith Street Park and Bailey Avenue Park.

The Ohio Street site is a widely recognized fishing access site, and is a popular launch site for canoes and kayaks. A hidden gem lies at the foot of Smith Street along the Buffalo River, with excellent southerly views of the River and historic grain elevators. It also has a naturalized wetland / pond area which is more reminiscent of an earlier time in history, before industries took over the landscape. The Bailey Avenue site lies at the confluence of the Buffalo River and Cazenovia Creek. Both the Smith Street and Bailey Avenue park sites have become favorite fishing locations. A fourth County park site is currently being developed at the “Seneca Bluffs” site just east of the Bailey Avenue site at Seneca Street and Avon Place.

#### PARK AND AREA HISTORY

All three Buffalo River Properties (Ohio Street, Smith Street and Bailey Avenue) have a similar story and history along the Buffalo River. There was a point in Buffalo’s history when the city was one of the largest and most powerful industrial centers in all the country, and the Buffalo River was at the epicenter of this industrial might. Ships once traveled up and down the river, servicing the numerous grain elevators, steel mills and other factories. It now seems hard to believe that heavy Industry once dominated this urban river-scape, and all three sites were formerly utilized for industrial related uses. Although some industry does still exist and some ships do pass through, it is a fraction of its former use, and now fish, wildlife and vegetation have come back to reclaim their historical homes.

#### EXISTING PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES

##### *Ohio Street*

- Parking area
- Canoe / Kayak launch
- Walkways and benches
- River Overlooks

##### *Smith Street*

- Parking area
- Fishing access
- Nature Trails
- River Overlooks
- Pond/wetland

##### *Bailey Avenue*

- Nature Trails
- Fishing access
- River Overlooks / seating areas

## LOCAL CONTEXT

The area around the three park sites is former industrial lands and still shows signs of this former use. Urban neighborhoods that once were vibrant with factory workers living in the shadows of their employers, are now much less vibrant and many are in need of revitalization.

The **Ohio Street** site is closest to the mouth of the River and Downtown Buffalo. It is accessed directly from Ohio Street near the intersection with Louisiana Street. An active business lies to the south of the park site and a vacant lot lies to the north of the site. Across Ohio Street are residences within the City's First Ward, along with Conway Park, a city owned park active recreation area and former Ohio Street Turning Basin for the Erie Canal.

The **Smith Street** site is only a couple blocks south of busy South Park Avenue, and is easily accessible from the I-190 (Smith Street exit), yet is the most remote of the three River sites. It is hidden from any major views by the former railroad berm (the rail bridge abutments are still visible), and is situated between two very active railroad lines.

The **Bailey Avenue** site lies in a small triangular piece of land between the Buffalo River, Cazenovia Creek and Bailey Avenue. It is just south of the major intersection of Elk Street, Seneca Street and the I-190, and just north of the major city intersections of McKinley Parkway and South Park Avenue. Southside Elementary School lies across Bailey Avenue to the east.

## RECREATIONAL CONTEXT

All of the Buffalo River Sites are passive, nature-based sites. Other area recreational offerings include:

- Tifft Nature Preserve
- Conway Park
- Houghton Park

## CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

- *All three sites suffer from urban conditions and abuse*
- *The remoteness of the Smith Street site makes it hard to*







*patrol and to care for.*

- *The Bailey Avenue site is overgrown and not a comfortable and safe setting.*

## MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Continue to support recent master plan efforts and restoration initiatives by the Friends of the Buffalo River, and recently completed park developments at all three County sites.*
- *Continue to monitor natural systems at each property to assure future sustainability and habitat enhancement.*
- *Provide additional safety measures; overgrowth of the Bailey Avenue site has created an uncomfortable setting for potential park users; Isolation of the Smith Street site will continue to be problematic until further activity can be generated in the area. Ohio Street has the most open visibility of the 3 sites, and yet has seen its share of vandalism of park features.*
- *Provide additional fishing access points wherever possible.*
- *Continue to promote public access to the River through trails, overlooks and boat launches.*

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# IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

## PRIORITY KEY

- S Short Term *(1 - 3 years)*
- M Mid Term *(4 - 10 years)*
- L Long Term *(11 - 20+ years)*
- O Ongoing *(Continuing Efforts each year)*